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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001606

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: POLLSTERS PREDICT AKP WIN, LONG-TERM
RESENTMENT TOWARD US

REF: 06 ANKARA 4888

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Nancy McEldowney, for reasons 1.
4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. A cross section of leading pollsters from Ankara and Istanbul agreed that public opinion in Turkey shows deep polarization, disaffection and fear about the future. Most significantly, all agree that under today's conditions and barring unforeseen interventions, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) would come to power again as a single party government. They also believe that hostility toward the US is likely to continue even if US policies change. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In a recent discussion with several diverse polling organizations, the pollsters viewed political players slightly differently but found consensus on major points. Metropoll's Ozer Sencar observed that political polarization is not the result of a fundamental social conflict, but rather a lack of real choice. Voters default to AKP and opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) for lack of an alternative; virtually no leaders inspire confidence. He added that while about 20 percent of AKP supporters are rigidly committed to the party, AKP is now approaching 40 percent in polls. This surge is due both to Erdogan's skill, as the only leader who "offers" a bright and positive future, and the utter lack of competition from other party leaders. (All agreed that CHP's support is in spite of Deniz Baykal, who is openly hated within the party). Mustafa Karaman of POLAR contended that only Erdogan and Genc Party leader Cem Uzan excite people. Emre Erdogan of Istanbul's Infakto Research credited AKP's track record, particularly on health care, for giving it a more solid footing than it had when it swept into parliament in 2002. Ibrahim Uslu of ANAR (one of AKP's main polling contractors) argued that AKP is not a "conjuncture party," where the stars align briefly to send it to the top, but rather a party that already had a solid foundation. He stated that the top determinants of voter preferences are one's family situation for the last five years and expectations of the future. Political performance is only one -- and not the most important -- factor.

13. (C) Pollsters reported that a confirmed minority -- between one-fifth and one-third of Turks -- see the AKP as a threat to secularism. The vast majority holding this view will vote CHP, they agreed. Far-right Nationalist Action

Party (MHP) is unlikely to win their votes because the party has not established a clear position on hallmark "secularist" issues like the headscarf debate. Most voters do not see a threat from AKP, and at the same time respect the Turkish General Staff (TGS). Indeed, the TGS may have overplayed its hand; the public defensively backed AKP following the April 27 TGS memorandum warning of threats to the secular republic.

Emre Erdogan observed that the public resents supragovernmental entities that obstruct political decisions; "lawless decisions" are unpopular. CHP also enjoyed a boost in the wake of the memorandum and mass rallies in major cities, but only 3-5 percentage points.

¶4. (C) On perceptions of the United States, one participant joked, "If you work a bit harder, you can bring your ratings down to zero." Frustration toward the US is almost completely directed at the current administration and at our Northern Iraq and PKK policies (with the exception of extreme nationalist and extreme religious individuals, Turks in general "have no problem with the American people"). However, participants expressed doubts as to whether public opinion would bounce back even if these two areas were addressed; some were skeptical that after years of anger and frustration stemming from the Iraq war, inaction on the PKK, "infamous maps," and the perception Turkey is being divided, US efforts in Northern Iraq could win back Turkish hearts.

¶5. (C) The pollsters were cautious about predicting beyond the immediate future; they expect the July 22 general election to occur on time, but cautioned that pressures exist in both directions. Emre Erdogan observed that the Supreme Election Board is determined to keep to the planned date and the Istanbul money elites do not want a postponement.

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Ibrahim Uslu remained concerned that -- even short of a cross-border operation or declaration of martial law -- if security forces determined that they could not protect the ballot boxes, they could postpone the vote. A sense of fear pervades in the Turkish public: fear of the AKP, the military, the jandarma, separatism, and terrorism (Turks are angry, not afraid, of the US). Emphasizing that one month is a long time in Turkish politics, each predicted that, under today's conditions at least, AKP will prevail with a single-party government.

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